

La. House, Senate to weigh new districts

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BATON ROUGE — State lawmakers will take different paths today trying to shape Louisiana's new congressional districts that will put one of the current congressmen out of work.

Louisiana has to trim its congressional delegation in the House by one member, because of insufficient population growth compared to other states. That forces districts to be larger, taking in about 755,562 people each.

Six of the current seven congressmen — U.S. Reps. Rodney Alexander of Quitman, Charles Boustany of Lafayette, Bill Cassidy of Baton Rouge, John Fleming of Minden, Jeff Landry of New Iberia, Cedric Richmond of New Orleans and Steve Scalise of Metairie — have visited with legislators in the special session on redistricting.

All but Landry supposedly agreed to a basic plan, but Richmond and Boustany have splintered from the group.

Landry told the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee last week "Please represent the wishes of the people and not worry about where you place us but where you place the people."

"This is supposed to be a process in which citizens choose who represents them, rather than the representatives choosing who they represent," said Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, chairman of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee.

Before the Senate convenes, its redistricting committee is scheduled to consider other congressional redistricting bills, including SB3 by Sen. Lydia

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Jackson, D-Shreveport, SB23 by Sen. Rob Marionneaux, D-Livonia, and SB2 by Sen. Bob Kostelka, R-Monroe, the chairman of the committee.

Jackson's and Marionneaux's bills are similar with east-west districts but vary in the re-creation of the state's only minority district.

Jackson's SB3 drew considerable support from Lafayette interests, including Sen. Mike Michot, when it was reviewed in the committee because it keeps so many Acadiana parishes whole.

Every plan on the House

and Senate floors today would consolidate the districts currently represented by Boustany and Landry.

Gallot said he is impressed with the three bills his committee sent to the House floor debate, even though the panel rejected his HB3.

Two of the House bills have north-south districts in the northern part of the state and one has relatively horizontal districts.

He said the diversity of the plans "shows the committee has thoroughly gone through this process."

Gallot said Thibodaux Rep. "Dee" Richard's bill "does a better job of reflecting what we heard on the road from citizens."

Like Jackson's and Marionneaux's bills, Richard's has an "I-20 District" that links Shreveport and Monroe, has a district that takes in the farm belt through the center of the state and has three congressional districts that reach the coast.

The leading vote-getter in committee, though, was Baton Rouge Rep. Erich Ponty's plan with roughly vertical districts in the northern part of the state.

The Senate today is set to debate SB24 by Sen. Neil Riser, R-Columbia, which was approved by the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee.

Riser's bill has the vertical plan backed by Gov. Bobby Jindal, which has two dis-

tricts based in Monroe and Shreveport that run side-by-side through the top of the state, reaching down to Acadiana parishes.

The 4th District, currently represented by Fleming, bypasses Calcasieu Parish but takes in most of Jeff Davis, stopping at the Cameron Parish line. It also has most of Acadia Parish and all of Evangeline.

The 5th District, currently represented by Alexander, takes in 21 parishes starting on the west at Union and Lincoln parishes,

winds its way southward to include Rapides, Avoyelles, St. Landry, Pointe Coupee and upper St. Martin parishes. Lower St. Martin is in the 6th District, currently represented by Cassidy.

The combined 3rd and 7th districts, in which Landry and Boustany would compete, include Calcasieu, Cameron, Vermilion and a piece of Acadia, Iberia, St. Mary and Terrebonne.

Much of the rest of the current 3rd District goes into the 1st District, currently represented by Scalise.

The House also approved HB43 by Slidell Rep. Greg Cromer, which is similar to Riser's, except it extends the Baton Rouge district through Lafourche Parish to the Gulf of Mexico.

All of the proposed plans retain a minority district that's currently represented by Richmond and based in New Orleans. However, because of decreased black population there, the plans extend the district to Baton Rouge, where Richmond could pick up challengers in a re-election bid.